

1Pet 4.12-16—Enduring Christian Suffering

How to understand Christian suffering

- I. Our sufferings for Christ's sake are fiery trials, v.12.
 - A. They're part and parcel of the Christian life, designed by God to try us and test us, 1.6-7.
 - B. This helps us understand that our trials are sent by God for our good. Peter uses the image of purifying fire to remind us that our trials are not meant to ruin us but to improve us. Nothing is lost in our suffering but our dross, Isa 43.1-3.
 - C. So we need to look at our afflictions, not as they are in themselves but rather as they are coming from God. How they spring from His love, are part of Christ's gifts to us, come to sanctify us, and give way to greater fellowship with Christ. Only in this way can we be patient under them and rejoice in them, v.13; Js 1.2-4.
- II. Our sufferings are our sharing in Christ's sufferings, v.13.
 - A. Of course, there's a radical uniqueness and aloneness to Christ's sufferings. He alone suffered as an atonement for our sins, Isa 53.5-6. He alone bore our sins in His body on that tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, 1Pet 2.24. His suffering alone reconciled us to God, Col 1.21-22.
 - B. Our sufferings for Christ's sake are not atoning or penal. Rather, our being called by God to suffer for the sake of Christ and the gospel is an abiding and encouraging testimony to our belonging to Christ and our being brought by the Spirit into the full fruition and benefit of His suffering for us, Jn 15.18-21; Isa 53.5.
 - C. To suffer for Christ's sake is to find fellowship with Christ. It's to be made conformable to Christ. And it's to be the blessed recipient of those mercies, comforts, and tokens of God's love that are only found in the fiery trials of Christian suffering.
- III. But Peter takes us even higher in v.13. He says the greatest blessing of suffering for Christ is that it's promised to give way to being glorified with Christ when He returns, Gal 4.4-7.
 - A. No wonder we're blessed when we suffer for His sake, v.14!
- IV. But we're not to suffer as evildoers do, for doing evil. The blessings found in suffering aren't attached to suffering itself, but to that suffering which is for a holy cause, namely for Christ's sake, v.15.

How to respond to Christian suffering

- I. Peter tells us to rejoice, v.13.
 - A. Our rejoicing doesn't arise from a denial of the pain or loss or suffering that's involved, but rather from a believing embrace of what God says about our suffering: that they're tokens of His love, that they come with His comforts, that they promote the gospel, that they glorify Him, that they sanctify us, and that He puts all our tears in a bottle, Ps 56.8; Rom 8.28-29; Heb 12.5-11.
- II. Peter tells us not to be ashamed to suffer for Christ, but to glorify God in it, v.16; Acts 5.41. And when we read over the many reasons listed just in this passage, we can clearly see that we have no reason to be ashamed (Rom 1.16), and every reason to endure our suffering honorably, as Christians should, so that God will be glorified in us, Acts 20.24.

How to endure Christian suffering

- I. We need to bring a heart of submission to our suffering, cf. Jn 18.11.
 - A. When God calls us to suffer, it's an opportunity to show our love for Christ, an opportunity to manifest the graces He's given us, an opportunity to deny ourselves, resign ourselves, and submit ourselves to His will, Mt 6.10; 26.39.
- II. How can we be so quiet and submissive under suffering?
 - A. Stop thinking so much about our sufferings when we're going through them.
 1. It's almost impossible to endure suffering well if all we think about is our suffering. Instead, we should think about those things that'll encourage us, despite our sufferings, Gen 35.18.
 2. Set your mind on God's faithfulness to His people in suffering, on God's presence with them in suffering, on God's work in suffering, and on God's goodness in suffering, Rom 8.28-30; Heb 12.10-11.
 - B. Always think well of God's ways with you. It greatly dishonors God when you think ill of Him in the face of suffering, Ps 84.11; Jer 32.40-41; Rom 8.31-39.
 - C. Look on all your suffering as a participation in Christ's sufferings, which means they've all been sanctified to you, Rom 8.28.
 - D. In all your suffering, rest on the exceedingly precious promises of God, 2Pet 1.4; Isa 43.1-3. He never has nor ever will forsake His people or call them to suffer without a holy, loving, gracious purpose to do them good in it, Jer 32.40-41; Heb 13.5-6.